

# The 66-Day Saga Of Mayflower I

The cold-weather crossing of the Pilgrims  
in 1620 was a survival test on an epic scale.

By SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON

**C**OLONIALISM may be on the way out, but we Americans, having got rid of it in 1776, are rather sentimental about our colonial past. And that is all to the good, because the basic institutions of free America date from the colonial era. On Sunday, March 31, the greatest traffic jam in the history of the nation's capital was created not by the visit of a prince or potentate—or even of a President—but by the presence of three small sailing vessels, the Susan Constant II, Goodspeed II and Discovery II, reproductions of those that brought the first settlers of Jamestown in 1607. These were built near by in Virginia, but the Mayflower II, built at Brixham in England, is about to cross the Western Ocean under sail, without benefit of towline, auxiliary engine or radio direction finder. When she arrives—and may all the gods grant her a prosperous voyage!—it is expected that there will be insufficient road space on Cape Cod to accommodate the tourists.

Alan Villiers, master of the Mayflower II, may have difficulties getting to sea, but by no means as many as the Pilgrim Fathers had with the original Mayflower in 1620; and there is no reason for him to have so rough a voyage as they had. For Captain Villiers has chosen the time of year when there is the highest proportion of easterly winds in the North Atlantic. The original Mayflower sailed in September, about the worst month, on an average, for a westerly passage under sail. It took her sixty-six days from Plymouth in old England to the site of Provincetown in New England. The all-time sailing-ship record for this route was pegged in 1860 by the American clipper ship Andrew Jackson, which made Sandy Hook in just fifteen days from Rock Light, Liverpool. The Mayflower II can count on no such good luck, but with a fair chance of wind, and Alan Villiers as skipper, she should cut the original Mayflower's time in half. The old Mayflower was not too slow, as is proved by the fact that she sailed home in only thirty days, and with a short crew at that; but she was no speed queen, even for 1620.

**A** CHAIN of circumstances was responsible for her late-season start. In the first place, the Pilgrim Fathers (and Mothers) were poor English exiles in Holland, and when they decided to emigrate to Anglo-America it took time to get a patent and still more to find the necessary money. Through a connection between William Brewster and Sir Edward Sandys, treasurer of the Virginia Company, they obtained permission to settle anywhere they chose in the vast domain that was then Virginia, and to enjoy local self-government. They intended to pitch their plantation somewhere near the mouth of the Hudson River, which the Dutch already claimed but had not yet settled.

**B**UT how to get there? In the end they were financed by a group of London small business men who called themselves the Adventurers, although they adventured only their money. The leader of the group was Thomas Weston, a hardware merchant who was looking for a good speculation. He and his fellows drove a hard bargain, agreeing to charter a ship and provide the initial outlay of food, clothing and supplies in return for the Pilgrims' working for them like slaves. After seven years, each colonist 16 years old or more would receive exactly the same share of the accumulated profits and capital as an Adventurer who put £10 sterling into the kitty.

The Adventurers would not even allow the colonists to own the houses they might build, or to work one day a week for themselves. The Pilgrims wanted the Adventurers to buy a vessel for them, but "Mr. Weston makes himself merry with our endeavors about buying a ship," as one of them wrote; and in the end they had to be content with having the Mayflower chartered for them by the Adventurers, and buying with their own money the pinnace Speedwell, which they intended to use as a fishing and trading vessel in the New World.

**T**HESE protracted negotiations explain in part why they made such a late start. But the Pilgrims had sold all they owned, and could not afford to tarry in England until another spring. Besides, William Brewster and Edward Winslow were "wanted by the police" for having printed prohibited Puritan tracts in Holland.

"Mayflower," as the English call the blossom of the hawthorn, was a favorite name for ships—almost as common as "Rose" and "Mary"; but research has enabled us to reconstruct at least the bare bones of the Pilgrim Mayflower's history. Her master ever since she had been built, Christopher Jones of Rotherhithe on the Thames, was also a quarter-owher. She registered 180 tons, which means that her hold could take 180 "tuns," or double-hogsheads of wine. She was at least 12 years old, had made a voyage to Norway when she was new and later engaged in the wine trade between England and Bordeaux. At the end of January, when chartered by the Adventurers, she had just brought 153 tuns and sixteen hogsheads of French wines to London. That was lucky for the Pilgrims: a wine (Continued on Page 42)

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ship was "sweet," i. e., clean and healthy, because the leakage from the wine casks neutralized the filth that sailors and passengers threw into the bilges. Capt. John Smith called her a "leaking, unwholesome ship," but he never sailed in her, and he took a dim view of the whole Pilgrim enterprise anyway, since he had applied for the job that Myles Standish got, and had been turned down.

**W**E do not know how much the chartering and fitting-out at Southampton cost the Adventurers — probably about £1,500 — but the Pilgrims themselves had to throw in a lot more because their backers were niggardly in what they would provide. The Pilgrims' chief provisions were barrels of pickled beef and pork and "hard tack," or ship biscuit, which kept almost indefinitely but was so hard they had to soak it before eating or it would break their teeth. In addition, a certain amount of salted flour was packed in kegs, sealed with wax, for baking bread in the New World; and a great deal of salted butter was bought from farmers and sealed up in wooden firkins.

A few barrels of water were supplied against an emergency but, as Englishmen, they depended for their steady beverage on beer—strong enough to stand the ocean voyage without going sour. The barrels were built on the spot by the ship's cooper, who also saw to it that they were stowed properly and that they kept in proper condition so that the beer would not leak into the hold. That, incidentally, is how John Alden got his chance to sail and, eventually, to win his girl; John was hired as the Mayflower's cooper at Southampton.

Except for cheeses and dried peas and beans, these were the only provisions carried in

a ship of those days. The wealthier Pilgrims, such as Governor Carver and Elder Brewster, brought a few luxuries—lemons, sweet oil, sugar and raisins—which they shared with the sick and feeble; but the crew and the greater part of the passengers had a monotonous diet of salt meat, hard bread, boiled beans and beer. That was the kind of thing which, for want of vitamins, led to scurvy on long voyages. All the cooking was done on a brick hearth resting on the sand ballast in the hold, with wood as fuel; that galley fire was the only artificial heat on the ship.

Some people who visit the Mayflower II will wonder how her predecessor accommodated 102 passengers in addition to a crew of twenty to twenty-five, but anyone who served on an LCI or a destroyer in the last war can give the answer—triple-tiered bunks. Some men slept in the shallop, the thirty-three-foot boat which was stowed in the 'tween decks; in using this boat for a dormitory they sprang her timbers so that the ship's carpenter had a job repairing her after they landed.

**S**INCE the Pilgrims expected trouble with the Indians, they hired Myles Standish, who had fought in the "Dutch Wars," to train them, and brought a supply of muskets, gunpowder and shot. There were also carpenters' and masons' tools and tools for digging. And there were a hundred other items, such as extra clothing and shoes, fish nets and tackle, that would be needed to sustain life in an uninhabited country. In outfitting themselves they doubtless profited by the English experience of thirteen years in Virginia.

A last-minute crisis came with a flock of "land sharks" waving bills to the

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amount of nearly £100, which the Pilgrims had incurred for fitting out, but which Weston refused to pay. "So they were forced to sell off some of their provisions to stop this gap, which was some three or four-score firkins of butter \* \* \*." Finally, all was square, and the Mayflower and Speedwell set sail from Southampton on Aug. 5.

Shortly after began "the troubles that befell them on the coast and at sea," as their future Governor, William Bradford, wrote in his great "History of the Plymouth Plantation." They had not cleared the chops of the Channel when the master of the Speedwell complained that she was leaking so that he dared not sail into the open sea. It was decided to put into Dartmouth on Aug. 13 to repair her.

Workmen searched the Speedwell "thoroughly from stem to stern, some leaks were found and mended" and she appeared to be tight. "So with good hopes from hence," wrote Bradford, "they put to sea again, conceiving they should go comfortably on, not looking for any more lets of this kind; but it fell out otherwise."

**I**T sure did! The two vessels had proceeded about 300 miles beyond Lands End, Cornwall, when the wind and sea made up and the Speedwell began to leak so badly that "they could scarce free her with much pumping." So back they turned and put into Plymouth, where the pinnace was sold. Many of her passengers abandoned the voyage, but the more stout-hearted were taken on board the Mayflower, crowded as she already was.

It was Sept. 6 when, "these troubles being blown over, and now being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind, which continued divers days together, which was some encouragement to them." Then the easterly breeze dropped, and for the rest of the voyage the Mayflower had "cross winds and met with many fierce storms with which the ship was shroudly shaken, and

her upper works made very leaky."

At one point, half-seas over, it was seriously proposed to turn back, because one of the main beams cracked amidships and bent out of place, making the deck planking leak dreadfully. The passengers came to the rescue by breaking out of the hold "a great iron screw" which they had brought from Holland, probably for houseraising. This, seated on the keelson, was employed as a jack to push the bowed beam back into place and as a brace to keep it there; the deck planks and the garboard strake were caulked tight, and on went the Mayflower.

**I**T was a long, tedious and uncomfortable voyage. On several occasions "the winds were so fierce and the seas so high" that she could not carry sail, and lay to, drifting, for days on end. In one of these periods, "a lusty young man called John Howland" was thrown overboard by a sudden roll of the ship, but caught hold of the topsail halyards, which were trailing, and was hauled back on board with the aid of a boat hook.

The misery of the passengers in this crowded, tossing ship cannot easily be imagined. Bradford mentions that "many were afflicted with seasickness" at first, but that was the least of their troubles. They were never warm and almost never dry. If they went up on the crowded, cluttered deck they were soaked by the spray, and sailors handling the lines damned their eyes and told them to go below. There were no chairs on the fetid gundeck, and the salt water leaked through onto their bunks. The one fire on board had no vent for its smoke, which added to the foul atmosphere, and it had to be quenched when seas were high and the hatches were battened down. For days at a time people had only cold food. There was, of course, no plumbing, and no fresh water for washing; men, women and children slept in their wet clothes, with perhaps a blanket apiece.

It is a marvel that there

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were only two deaths on board; one of a young boy, servant to Samuel Fuller, and the other of a blasphemous seaman who had boasted "he hoped to help cast half of them [the passengers] overboard before they came to their journey's end, and to make merry with what they had." All agreed his death at sea of a "grievous disease" was a just judgment of God.

To offset the loss of the young servant, Elizabeth Hopkins gave birth to a son, who was appropriately named Oceanus; and shortly after the Mayflower anchored at Cape Cod, Susanna White produced a strapping baby boy who was named Peregrine—the Pilgrim. He outlived all the passengers, dying at the age of 84 in 1704. So life and death broke even on board the Mayflower.

**S**HE made her landfall on Cape Cod at daybreak Nov. 9, 1620, sixty-five days out from Plymouth. Capt. Sears Nickerson, who knows the Cape like a book, is certain that she approached it between Lat. 41 degrees 50 minutes N. and Lat. 41 degrees 55 minutes N., and first sighted the hills of Truro, where Highland Light now warns sailors to keep off the shoals. Captain Jones and one of the mates, who had made one or more fishing voyages to New England, knew very well where they were. At about 9 A. M. the wind came clear from the north, and the Mayflower went romping along within sight of the land—"not a little joyful," as Bradford says. Another couple of days should have taken them to the mouth of the Hudson, their intended destination.

But "God's good providence" willed it otherwise. In the late afternoon the ship found herself "amongst dangerous shoals and roaring breakers," on what is now called Pollock Rip off Monomoy. The wind died from the north, then came out of the south; the tide was running strong against her intended course; so Captain Jones and Governor Carver made the wise decision to "bear up again for the Cape."

**A**FTER one more night at sea, the Mayflower rounded the crooked finger of Cape Cod, and, at about 10 A. M. on Nov. 11, anchored in Great Harbor where Provincetown is now located.

The voyage was over. It was so late in the season—Nov. 21, according to our present calendar—that the Pilgrims decided to sail no further but to "look out a place for habitation."

On that same day, the Mayflower Compact—the first written American constitution—was drawn up and signed. The reason for it was that the "strangers" who had been added to the passenger list by the Adventurers had been boasting that they would "use their own liberty, for none had power to command them, the patent they had being for Virginia, and not New England." Thus there would be no legal authority unless the passengers agreed to create one, and that they did in the Mayflower Compact, which served as the basis of their government for many years.

**M**ANY trips were made ashore in the longboat at Provincetown, an informal thanksgiving service was held, the men and boys fished and dug clams and the women washed clothes in a freshwater pond.

As soon as the shallop was ready, most of the men passengers and some of the crew went exploring on Cape Cod and along the shore while the women and children stayed on board the ship. It was on Dec. 11 (or 21) that the exploring party landed at Plymouth, traditionally on the rock, and decided that this was the place to settle. Returning to the Mayflower, they sailed her into Plymouth Harbor—already so called on Capt. John Smith's map of New England—on the sixteenth and at once began building houses ashore.

Captain Jones obligingly stood by all that dreadful first winter, when half the colonists and a large number of the crew, weakened by the hardships and bad food of the voyage, sickened and died. It was not until April 5, 1621, that the Mayflower, short-handed, set sail for England.

**N**OBODY paid any attention to her, or to stout Captain Jones. Not a hundred people in England knew, or cared, whether the Pilgrims lived or died, and their ship was, perhaps, the least conspicuous of the forty or fifty vessels which went to Virginia every year with settlers, or to New England to fish. Captain Jones died at his home in Rotherhithe in early March, 1622, leaving a widow and two children. Two years later, acting on a petition from Mrs. Jones that the Mayflower was "in ruins," the High Court of Admiralty ordered her to be surveyed and appraised by "four mariners and shipwrights of Rotherhithe."

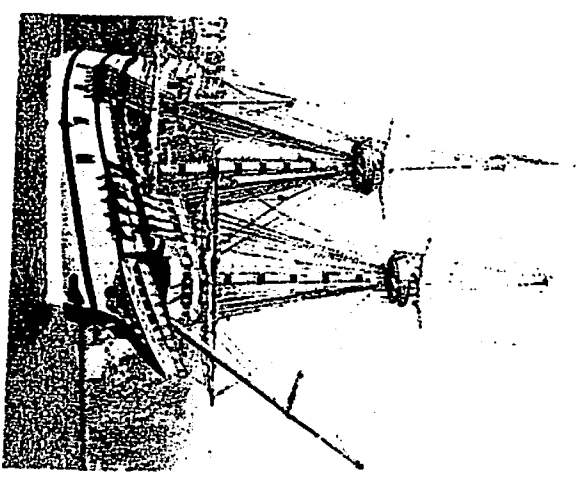
They valued her at £128 8s 4d, including one suit of worn sails (£15), spars and standing rigging (£35) and five anchors (£25). That was quite a comedown from the £800 for which she had been "prized" in 1609, when new. And as there was no running rigging in the inventory, we may infer that the gallant old ship had been dismantled after the death of her master, and that his widow was sending her to the scrap heap. Mrs. Jones probably sold as waste paper Christopher's logbooks. They would be worth more than their weight in gold today.



**CONSTITUTION**—The Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact, their basis of government for many years, while anchored off Provincetown.

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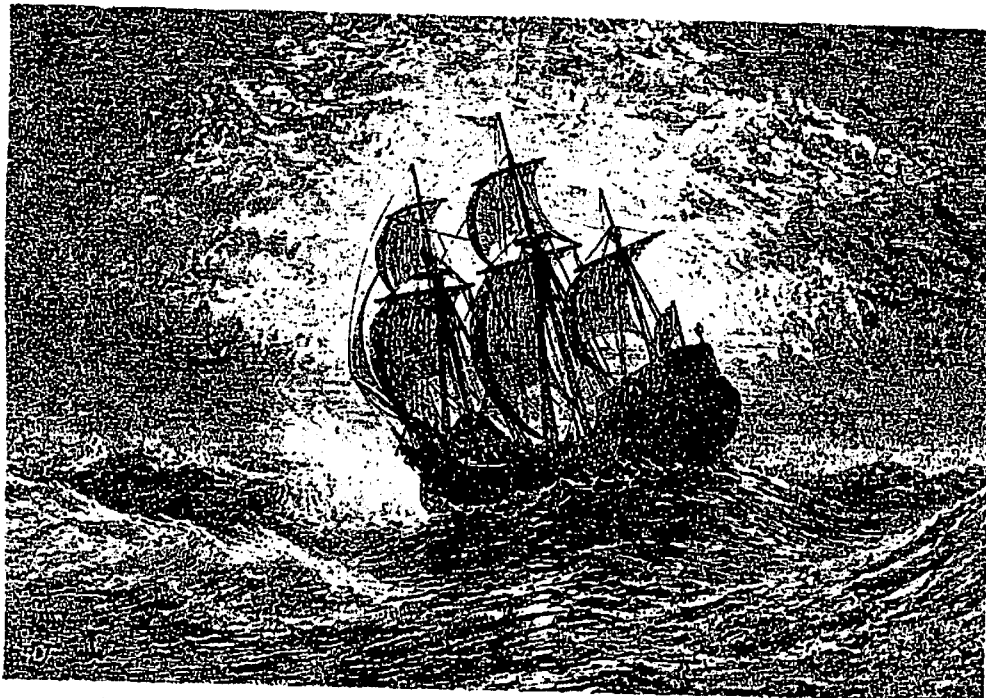
**NEW MAYFLOWER**  
—The reproduction of the pilgrims' famous ship, scheduled to start for America this month, floats placidly off Brixham, in England.



**ARRIVAL**—The settlers came ashore for good at Plymouth, a few days before Christmas and a month after they had first landed on Cape Cod. Half died before the winter ended.



**DEPARTURE**—The Pilgrims gather in prayer on the Mayflower, a 180-ton wine ship chartered by London merchants in 1620. They made two false starts before clearing for the New World.



**AT SEA**—The 102 passengers packed in triple-tiered bunks faced wretched rations, galley smoke and "storms with which the ship was shroudly shaken." The trip took over two months.